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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [KCOR](#) [SCUL](#) [CI](#)
SUBJECT: NORTHERN CHILE: CORRUPTION AND LOW-LEVEL
INDIGENOUS TENSION CHAFE LOCAL POLITICS

REF: A. SANTIAGO 733
[1](#)B. SANTIAGO 767

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In Chile's northernmost city, Arica, relations between the indigenous Aymara community and the overwhelmingly non-indigenous local political leadership are somewhat strained. Nonetheless, the indigenous community has successfully fought central government decisions that they opposed and is committed to resolving political problems peacefully. Arica has more than its share of corruption challenges--a notable exception in a country known for its transparency--with allegations of vote-buying, a mayor recently convicted of fraud, and an accusation that the leading mayoral candidate has accepted inappropriate contributions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Until the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), Arica was a part of Peru, separated from Chile by the larger city of Iquique, 300 kms to the south, and the Bolivian port of Antofagasta, 700 kms south of Arica. Chile's victory against Peru and Bolivia changed this, extending Chilean territory to these northern cities and cutting off Bolivia's access to the sea. While more than 100 years old, this history is still a critical part of relations between the three countries, with Peru recently having filed a claim at the International Court of Justice to redefine the maritime border between the two countries, and Bolivia making periodic grumblings about wanting to re-gain sea access. Poloff met with elected officials, law enforcement officers, business leaders, press, academic officials, and indigenous leaders in the Arica and Parinacota region of northern Chile October 1-3. Septels will report on border challenges and economic issues in the region.

Resentment and Frustration, But No Violence, Among Aymaras

[1](#)3. (U) Arica's population of indigenous Aymaras--identified as about 40,000 of the 200,000 people in Arica--account for nearly all the Aymaras in Chile. Nonetheless, they are dwarfed on the national political scene by the much more numerous Mapuche who live south of Santiago. The Aymaras suffered greatly under the "Chilenization" policies of decades past in which speaking in their native tongue was illegal and traditional Aymara culture was discouraged. Today, the few Aymara towns which exist in this overwhelmingly urban province are dying out as residents move to the city for jobs and better schools and only the elderly are left behind.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Indigenous leaders in the small altiplano town of

Putre and in the capital, Arica, complained that Chile's highly centralized government makes it difficult for their voices to be heard about decisions--like granting mining licenses--that affect them directly. But despite their protestations of weakness, on several occasions the indigenous community has banded together to successfully fight economic development plans with negative environmental impacts. And while many Aymara leaders complain about being ignored, there are also some critical voices within the community who say that the Aymara are overly reliant on the state's paternalism.

15. (SBU) Unlike the sometimes violent Mapuche struggle to the south, the Aymaras have resolved their differences peacefully and are considered to be very well integrated by Luis Rocafull, the "intendente" or centrally appointed governor of the province. Aymara leaders in Putre and Arica reported close ties with other Aymaras in Bolivia and Peru, and Hortencia Hidalgo, President of the Indigenous Women's Council, said that she and other community members are trying to work with the Mapuche to move beyond a cultural agenda to one that is more political, including proposals to amend the constitution to recognize indigenous people; greater autonomy; control over territory (e.g. similar to Native American reservations in the U.S.); and increasing indigenous participation in Chile's legislature.

Corruption and the Mayoral Election

16. (SBU) In a country that is consistently ranked by Transparency International as Latin America's least corrupt, this city of 200,000 is responsible for a disproportionate share of Chile's relatively few scandals. A number of local politicians, including the former mayor, have been convicted of embezzling and misuse of public office, often related to municipal services performed by their businesses. Socialist Diputado Ivan Paredes suggested that the current front-runner in the mayoral race, Waldo Sankan, has also been involved in corruption. "If he's not affiliated with any party or coalition, who is paying to run his campaign?" the deputy rhetorically asked. (Note: Sankan recently left the Party for Democracy (PPD) to run as an independent when the center-left Concertacion alliance, which includes the PPD, backed Radical Social Democrat (PRSD) member Patricio Zapata. The latest polls show Sankan with a slight lead over conservative Alianza candidate Nino Baltolu, with Zapata in third place. End Note.)

17. (SBU) While Intendente Rocafull contended that corruption was minimal and always detected eventually, members of the indigenous community told Poloff that vote-buying and fraud were widespread. For example, they alleged that mayoral and city council candidates routinely set up day trips targeted at Aymaras living in Arica but with roots (and voter registration addresses) in the small town of Putre. Participants are bused to Putre for a day of fun at the thermal springs and a free lunch, taken to vote, and then paid USD 150 for participating. As a result, while Putre has a permanent population of about 1,200 adults, 5,000 to 6,000 votes are cast there in local elections. In a separate incident, the mayor of Putre was recently featured in a 60 Minutes-style TV show in an expose of officials who misuse official trips overseas.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Chile's Aymara community takes a peaceful approach to resolving political conflict, a welcome contrast to the sporadic violence used by some extremist Mapuche in the eighth and ninth regions of Chile. Nonetheless, the community feels ignored by all sides--local government, central government, and political parties. Arica's corruption challenges, while not severe, are notable given the country's overall squeaky-clean image. END COMMENT.
SIMONS